

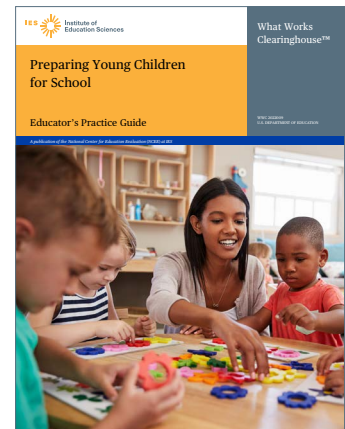
Recommendation 5: Intentionally plan activities to build children’s vocabulary and language



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The vocabulary children develop when they are 3, 4, and 5 years old plays a pivotal role in their later language and reading development and subsequent academic success. Learning new words and their meanings helps children understand new information they come across, which helps them learn more words. In this way, vocabulary development is cumulative.

The key to vocabulary development in preschool is repeated exposure and opportunities to use new words in a variety of contexts and conversations around themes interesting to children. The panel recommends providing children with many opportunities to hear and use vocabulary words over time, such as through shared book reading, activities and games, and engagement in conversations. The steps in this recommendation from the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide *Preparing Young Children for School* outline how to choose words, introduce new vocabulary, and reinforce and encourage use of the new vocabulary throughout the day.



How to carry out the recommendation

1. **Choose 3-5 unique words to focus on each week and include review of those words in other weeks.** The panel suggests choosing 3-5 words to teach each week that are likely to be unknown to most of the children in class. Look for words that will be useful to know because the words occur frequently in books, conversations, or other academic contexts. It can be helpful to choose a group of words that relate to a topic or belong in a category that interests the children. Gradually increase the complexity of words throughout the year.
2. **Introduce the words and their meanings.** Spend time directly discussing the word and what it means. Begin by explaining the meaning of the vocabulary word using words the children already know. Ensure that all children have an opportunity to think about the word and relate it to something they know or have experienced. Ask children to share something related to the word or think about when they experienced the word. Children need to use the word to retain knowledge of its meaning.
3. **Choose activities and materials that will offer children opportunities to practice using the target vocabulary words.** Set up opportunities for the words to come up in children’s play. Bring out materials that portray or connect to target words or set up scenarios for children to act out the words when appropriate. As children interact with the activities and materials, look for ways to incorporate conversation about the target vocabulary. Consider leading children in acting out the word, possibly using figurines, puppets, or other props.
4. **Engage in interactive conversations with children to reinforce or solidify understanding of vocabulary words.** Learning words primarily takes place when children hear and use the words frequently and in different contexts over time. Look for ways throughout the day to reintroduce the target vocabulary words into conversations with children to provide additional opportunities for children to hear and use the words. In addition to the target vocabulary words, discuss other words as opportunities arise. Choose words that are relevant to the children, their lives, cultural backgrounds, and what is happening during the preschool day. Use questions strategically to prompt children to respond using the words they have learned.